

## Rezensionen – Comptes rendus – Reviews

**Babb, James (ed.):** *The SAGE Handbook of Modern Japanese Studies.*

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The new handbook of modern Japanese studies is a voluminous work that contains five parts (land, history and culture; society; medicine and health care; politics and foreign relations; economy), 33 individual articles and 672 pages in total. To get such a work together is a huge achievement and we have to congratulate James D. Babb as the single editor and the involved staff of SAGE for their immense work and successful persistence. Anybody who ever edited a special issue or an edited volume will feel sympathetic with the editor when he mentions in the acknowledgements that the project has taken a long time and had to get back on track, as well as when he thanks his wife, hoping that she “will hopefully never have to hear [him] talk about this project again” (p. xvii). Still, beyond its biblical dimensions, we have to congratulate James D. Babb foremost for this new handbook because of the quality of its contributors and content. The list of authors reads like a who’s who of leading scholars who have greatly contributed in recent years to our current understanding of Japanese society, economy, and politics. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the articles are, in general, well-balanced introductions to their topics and include at the same time up-to-date information about new developments as well as recent research results and current scholarly debates.

It is not possible to do full justice to this state-of-the-art handbook and its many articles in a short book review, but arguably the best way to evaluate this handbook is by comparing its structure with other handbooks, reference works, and scholarly introductions on Japan. After all, in recent years, a large number of such books and new editions have been published in English on Japan’s society (Bester et al. 2011; Hendry 2013; Kreiner et al. 2004; Sugimoto 2014), its economy (Flath 2014), and its politics (Gaunder 2011; Hayes 2009; Hook et al. 2012; Inoguchi/Jain 2011; Shinoda 2013). Moreover, handbooks and introductions on current Japan have also been published in other languages (in German, for example: Kevenhörster et al. 2010) or on specific topics like, for example, Japan’s demographic development (Coulmas et al. 2008), its current critical issues (Kingston 2014) or its contemporary religions (Prohl/Nelson 2012; Swanson/Chilson

2006). And Kinokuniya has published a few years ago a collection of three volumes about postwar Japanese studies (Iwasaki et al. 2008–2009).

The main focus of the new Sage handbook is clearly on the core research in social sciences and not on connected cultural studies. It includes a first part on land, history, and culture, this part consists of articles on modern history (Andrew Cobbing), social anthropology (Carolyn S. Stevens), religion (Lucia Dolce), mass media (Katja Valaskivi), geography (Mary McDonald), and regionalism (Anthony Rausch). The only article on a cultural topic is by Noriaki Nishiyama on heritage management. Japan's mass culture, including anime, manga, J-pop, movies, or TV drama, as well as connected themes like cool Japan or Japan's (new) soft power, are mentioned in several contributions, but comprehensive analysis of these topics and articles devoted to them are not included in the handbook. In view of the recent boom of these themes in Japanese studies as well as of their rising importance for Japan's international standing and perception, this omission is rather surprising. Anybody interested in an overview and introductory discussions of Japan's mass culture and its recent boom abroad will still have to consult the third part of the handbook by Bester et al. (2011: 199–285).

The second part on Japan's society includes contributions on education (Robert W. Aspinall), feminism (Vera Mackie), sexuality (Marc McLelland), gender (Joyce Gelb), policing (David T. Johnson), and organized crime (Peter Hill). Hence, in comparison to other introductions and handbooks on Japan's society, the emphasis is strongly on the diversity and fringes of Japanese society as well as on deviant behavior and its social control in Japan. The mainstream middle class families as the societal core is rather sidelined, respectively discussed only as background foil. This may show how far Japanese studies and its main sociological research questions have changed in recent decades. However, it is still surprising that, for example, Ezra Vogel's classical study on the new urban middle class (Vogel 1963) is not quoted even once in a handbook on modern Japanese studies. Moreover, even if emphasizing Japan's social diversity is representative for current social-anthropological and sociological research on Japan, one cannot help to register that certain dimensions of diversity and social inequality like social class or ethnic minorities have not been devoted their own articles. In view of the heated debate on rising income, declining social mobility, and new poverty in Japan under the slogan of "gap society" (*kakusa shakai*) or new immigration movements and, hence, new ethnic minorities, such contributions would have been of high relevance. Moreover, again, in contrast to other introductory publications, family as a core element of Japan's society and an important topic in past and current social science research on Japan is also not fully covered in its own chapter. Finally, readers might also miss a chapter on national identity, nationalism, and *nihonjinron*. The only chapter on ideological or discursive aspects is the one discussing feminism.

Medicine and health care are the themes of the third part of the handbook. It includes chapters on the history of Japanese medicine (Izumi Yokoyama and Michael D. Fetters), health care (Jonathan E. Rodnick, Izumi Yokoyama, and Michael D. Fetters), medical education (Michael D. Fetters and Izumi Yokoyama), bioethics (Michael D. Fetters), and mental health (Denise St Anaault). As the editor highlights in his introduction, this part “is an encyclopedic overview of the topic which has no parallel in English” (p. xxii), and some readers will more than welcome the innovative character of the handbook by extensively addressing this theme. Still, as a handbook on Japanese studies, the inclusion of this part might also seem a little bit forced. Studies and research on Japan’s medicine and health care have regularly been published in Japanese studies, but in view of the frequency of thematic publications, a part on another topic like, for example, family, demographic development, and social welfare would have been more representative for Japanese studies as a research field in recent years. There might have been good reasons and considerations for including a whole part on medicine and health care in the handbook, but unfortunately they are not explained or even hinted at in the introduction.

The fourth part is devoted to Japan’s politics and foreign relations. It begins with an introductory chapter on the study of Japan and Japanese politics in political science (James Babb) and continues with contributions on parties and elections (Kenneth Mori McElwain), postwar democracy (Sherry Martin Murphy), civil society (Yuko Kawato, Robert J. Pekkanen, and Hidehiro Yamamoto), international relations (Christopher W. Hughes), globalization (Hugo Dobson), and US-Japanese relations (Paul Midford), and concludes with a chapter on Chinese-Japanese relations (Caroline Rose). In comparison with the second part on society, this part on politics includes all-important topics and is well-balanced regarding the main themes, which are similar to those of other introductions to Japanese politics. This may also reflect the fact that political science is currently a much more homogeneous and structured research field in comparison to sociology, which has become in recent decades a very fluid research field that is increasingly diversifying into subfields. Still, one could argue that all the more a general introduction in the part on society on the main developments in the sociology of Japan like the fine introduction about research and theorizing in political sciences on Japan by James Babb would have been welcome and even more useful for a handbook on Japanese studies. As sociology as a research field is so diversified, we are in dear need of comprehensive and well-informed overviews that contextualize single developments.

Finally, economy is the topic of the fifth and final part of the handbook. Starting with a general overview on the Japanese economy (Marcus Rebeck), it contains contributions on business and management (Parissa Haghirian),

consumption (Parissa Haghirian), labor relations (Akira Suzuki), foreign workers (Gabriele Vogt), agriculture (Aurelia George Mulgan), and energy (Alexandru P. Luta and Paul Midford). Also, this part has some surprising omissions. Obviously one would have expected chapters on Japan's trade and its finance system, but also a contribution focusing on economic reforms and their impact would have reflected the main discussion point in Japan's current economic policies and recent research on Japan's political economy. In comparison to the introduction on the Japanese economy by Flath (2014), the chapters are written for a general readership and also easily understandable without any knowledge of economics.

To sum up, the new handbook surely convinces its readership by the quality of its contributors and their chapters. Still, regarding the topics, one has to note some surprising omissions and gaps in comparison to other handbooks and introductions available. Apart from the above mentioned topics missing in the different parts, whole important fields in modern Japanese studies like law are not included in the new handbook. In view of some other chapters on heritage management or the strong focus on medicine and health care, some readers may regard the new handbook as somehow one-sided and not fully covering the whole field. Others, on the other hand, may praise its innovative character. Moreover, references to scientific publications in Japanese are generally rather sparse in the quoted literature in the contributions. This reflects the fact that especially social science research on Japan in English is increasingly becoming its own cosmos somehow detached from Japanese research that is not published in English. Still, especially for a handbook on modern Japanese studies, it would have been highly valuable and rewarding to engage more with Japan's social sciences and to reflect on the interrelationship and mutual influences between Western and Japanese research on Japan. In this regard, we have to speak of a missed opportunity.

With a hefty list price of £110.00 for the printed hardcover, respectively £55.00 for the electronic version, the handbook will hardly be bought by many students of Japanese studies. Still, in view of its quality and up-to-date information, it is an obligatory purchase for all libraries that take Japan seriously. Its contributions will surely be broadly used in higher education in introduction courses on Japan and in introductory sessions of advanced teaching on Japan.

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